

The Common Core is bad for Connecticut students, parents, taxpayers and teachers. We already have the CAPT, CMT, SAT, AP tests and the ACT. This test would be administered via computer and will transfer teaching and learning to big, private corporations that will gather data on students and will cost the State untold millions.

This is not a test that measures acquisition of knowledge and academic skills, instead it is a confusing test that supposedly measures specious "21st century skills." The Smarter Balance tests - which will deliver these Common core Standards - echoes the literacy tests of the segregated South before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Most students will fail this bizarre test and it will then help the privatizers make their case that public schools are failing, which will then open the door to charter schools, which will take public money, but will not be under public control.

The Common Core is the center piece of the privatization movement. Just follow the money. The Gates foundation and numerous other private entities - many of which are benefiting from non-profit status - have been dumping millions of dollars into the adoption of the Common Core. Charter school companies, testing companies and big technology companies are behind the Common Core because it will help make schools fail, and along with the teacher evaluation system, the public school market place will be open - if they win this fight.

The amount of money that will be shifted out of the Connecticut economy if the Common core is adopted will be mind boggling. Teachers who live in this state spend their money in this state. The testing companies, charter companies and big tech firms will siphon money out of the state, as teachers will be demoted to mere facilitators, which Jeb Bush has already predicted.

Connecticut does not have a problem with its education system just because there is inequality in terms of student learning. Learning is an opportunity that can be availed of only if the student is ready. Students whose parents are poor, or middle class, but overworked, or living in an unstable home environment are not ready to learn. Poverty is complex and we are not dealing with it. Instead, the Malloy Administration along with Pryor and these other privatization lackeys are trying another one-size-fits-all, bogus testing scheme. We should be focusing on real issues like the minimum wage, childhood poverty, early childhood education, sustainable jobs and a host of other real issues. We need to completely reject this movement to privatize our public education system. In fact, I would make a plea to all Connecticut taxpayers, parents, teachers and students: "Just Say No!"

David Topitzer

The Science of Meditation

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years by people from a wide variety of cultures. Though traditionally a spiritual practice, meditation has more recently been identified by medical professionals as a uniquely effective way to improve mental and physical health. How does meditation work, and what does science have to say about its effects on practitioners?

While there are many ways to meditate, meditation is, at its core, simply a way of focusing awareness. Here is one of the most commonly taught ways to meditate: start by sitting on the floor or in a chair in a comfortable and relaxed position. Once you are comfortable, concentrate your awareness on your breathing. Simply follow your breath in and out, sensing the movement of your diaphragm as you breathe. As you focus on your breathing, notice how your mind tends to wander to other things: something you need to do later in the day, or a conversation you just had with your mother, or a fragment of a song, or questions like "Am I doing this right?" or even "*Why* am I doing this?" When you notice your attention wandering, simply acknowledge this new thought, watch it go by, and then return your awareness to your breathing. Don't try to fight against these wandering thoughts; telling yourself "I will *not* think of other things!" is just another thought that will distract you from your breathing. With practice and patience, you will find it easier and easier to keep your focus on your breath for extended periods. This type of meditation can be practiced every day and almost anywhere.

People who meditate regularly report numerous benefits. They feel calmer and more relaxed, and more prepared and clear-headed when responding to the challenges and frustrations of everyday life. These reported benefits have been supported by scientific research on meditation, research that has investigated the mental and physical changes that take place when a person meditates. Scientists have learned that meditation produces clear changes in a person's brain wave patterns and, in turn, affects how the body responds to normal physical demands and stress.

Brain waves are electrical impulses in the brain that correspond to different types or "levels" of awareness. For example, the "beta" brain wave pattern, measurable from about 13 to 100 cycles per second, is the pattern of normal waking consciousness and is associated with alert activity. Scientists measuring the brain waves of meditators have found that when

people meditate, these beta waves give way to different, slower brain wave patterns, including the “alpha” pattern (8 to 13.9 cycles per second) and the “theta” pattern (4 to 7.9 cycles per second). The alpha pattern is associated with what is often called the “relaxation response,” a wakeful yet restful state. The theta pattern corresponds to an even deeper state of mental and physical calm. Meditation, therefore, is a way of intentionally entering into a mental state of relaxation and calm. What is more, people who meditate regularly have a much greater ability to enter these calmer states of mind in their day-to-day living, whenever they need to.

These research findings have led to a tremendous increase in the use and promotion of meditation by health-care providers across the country, particularly for controlling stress. Stress is linked to a long list of mental and physical problems, including anxiety, depression, heart problems, and hypertension. By entering the calmer states of mind that are associated with meditation, practitioners can lower both their heart rate and blood pressure, therefore reversing the effects of the stress response. Meditation has also been shown to be useful in relieving pain, preparing patients for medical procedures, and helping them recover from surgery.

Meditation has also proven to be an effective way to enhance athletic and artistic performance. In many types of martial arts training, meditation is used extensively to develop concentration, mental clarity, and inner emotional balance. Meditative techniques are also used by many athletes, such as the practice of “visualization”—in which an athlete will picture him or herself performing at their best and accomplishing a desired result or goal—before a competition, shot, or routine.

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Read these two sentences from the text. Then, answer the question that follows.

How does meditation work, and what does science have to say about its effects on practitioners?

By entering the calmer states of mind that are associated with meditation, practitioners can lower both their heart rate and blood pressure, therefore reversing the effects of the stress response.

What is the meaning of *practitioner* as it is used in the text?

- ☐ Ⓐ a person engaged in the practice of a profession, such as law or medicine
- ☐ Ⓑ a person who does something repeatedly or often to improve
- ☐ Ⓒ a person authorized to apply medical techniques to others
- ☐ Ⓓ a person who engages in something regularly

The correct response, option D, receives a score of 1 point.



This question has two parts. First, answer part A. Then, answer part B.

Part A

Click on the statement that **best** identifies the author's purpose in writing this passage.

- A) Meditation can increase the effectiveness of medication.
- B) Meditation can improve a person's health and performance.
- C) Meditation can take a great deal of concentration to be beneficial.

Part B

Choose **two** statements that, if true, would **most** directly challenge the author's premises.

- A) Biofeedback is a form of increased awareness and manipulation of bodily functions.
- B) Medicine that blocks beta waves is often used to treat high blood pressure and heart disease.
- C) Experts who studied meditators found that long-term meditation improves an individual's concentration.
- D) Changes in brain structure, such as those reported by meditation studies, may have negative outcomes.

This item includes two parts, part A and part B. To receive the full-credit score of 1 point, the student must correctly answer both parts. The correct responses are option B in part A and options C and D in part B.